

A Translation into English of Khalil I. Al-Fuzai's “Elapsing Days” (Note 1)

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Abstract

A teacher considers resigning to return to his home village, but receives a letter telling him that he has already been transferred. In this story, homesickness is presented as if it were a challenging opponent. Identity is usually connected with the place to which it belongs, even if it is a “barren, dry desert” as is the case in the story. Yet one may have to move to another place for some reasons. Such displacement may cause mental and psychological consequences that, in turn, affect one's work. In the story, the teacher is not in a mood that helps him to teach; he is pulled “toward the place . . .” from which “a long distance . . . (Note 2) separates him.” What is left for him are “his thoughts and memories” that connect him with his place. At the end of the story, the memo given to him symbolizes a new hope to restore what he has lost in the *hijra* (Note 3) school. Like other protagonists in this collection who are trying to make a living, this protagonist sacrifices everything, including peace of mind, so as to “make his living and his family's living.” He struggles for survival in a changing society. Adaptation and change that become part of life are inevitable. The main character is sent to the *hijra*, a small isolated village, in order to take part in its educational change. On the other hand, the story illustrates the effects of the society on a newcomer; in a rural community, “he becomes an uncouth person” like other people in that *hijra*. He is ready to do anything to get money. In a poor but changing society, money becomes the chief concern; even emotions become commodities exchanged for money: the protagonist “is in this exile . . . in order to exchange his tears, his sighs, his sadness and his troubles for money.” The story also illustrates the importance of having a job and how difficult it is to find a good job in one's own area (Note 4). Finally, reading a story like this one will open the way for the readers of this popular journal a chance to know about this writer and may lead to searching for something related and/or written by the original writer whether in translation or the source language if the reader knows Arabic.

Keywords: Khalil Al-Fuzai, Saudi, short story, “Elapsing Days”

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Introduction:

Translation is an influential method that helps people become familiar with and get close to each other. In translating this story, the readers will read about some common problems that might be found anywhere in the globe, and become aware of Khalil I. Al-Fuzai (1940-); the writer of “Elapsing Days.” He is a “Saudi Arabian short story writer” who has done his utmost to introduce his culture in his literary writings and addressed “many social, political, and religious aspects he found in his society” (see Dohal 2013). In this story, like some other protagonists in Khalil I. al-Fuzai's stories (Dohal, 2018 & 2019), this individual in question struggles to overcome the financial difficulties he faces (see Dohal 2018 & 2019). After finding a job in that isolated village, his suffering starts. Thus, disappointment, and homesickness leads to more frustrating and disappointing consequences.

After publishing Al-Fuzai's “Elapsing Days,” readers of this distinguished journal will have a chance to read for this writer, and may search for other related materials to read and become aware of the culture in question (Dohal 2019).

Translation

This *hijra* is separated from any city buildings by vast areas of desert . . . and a sea of sands extending uncontrolled for long distances both far and wide . . . the desert separates him from the world . . . from time . . . and pulls him toward the place . . . toward the barren, dry desert to bury his memories in its sands, and his days are wasted with its people . . . even his time is no longer his own, nor does he care to have that time . . . everything is trivial . . . nothing requires care. This feeling has controlled him since his arrival in this *hijra*, till he feels hate and malice toward those who have caused his displacement to the *hijra* . . . when he entertains himself with taking matters easy and considers his displacement to this distant place a tax he has to pay, he aspires to end this exile at the same time and return to his homeland where he left his family and best memories . . . there in the distance . . . there in the unknown . . . live the loveliest people: his daughter, his wife, his mother, and his father. He cannot see them except for once a year when he goes to spend his summer vacation with them. Other than that, he is unable to see them while he is in this exile . . . he lives in order to exchange his tears, his sighs, his sadness and his troubles for money that he sends to them when he is paid and after taking some . . . some money is sent to his family, and some loses its way among the caravans of camels moving in the mazes of the desert. He has tried to convince himself to

bring his family to this place . . . but he has rejected this idea, for living here is no different from living in Hell. And since he has considered this place Hell, there has been no way to bring his family to such a place during the past years which made the city dweller accommodate himself to the bleak circumstances that he lives in, until adaptation becomes part of this life and the despicable acceptance of everything is one of its colors . . . years passed and made the city dweller a part of the *hijra* to which he moved. Hence it becomes his hell from which he cannot escape. Those who live around him are uncouth, so that he becomes an uncouth person . . . with regard to the good side of their life, primitiveness is about to erase its features . . . even values which people strongly adhere to and which he clashed with at the beginning because they were not in accordance with what he believed in . . . now he is influenced by them or he is just about to be.

He has no other option now but to stand in front of his students, a reading book in his hand, and let every student read in his book whenever his turn comes while he becomes remotely absent-minded.

One of the students says, "O teacher! Look . . . this student changed his seat in order to read before me."

He ignores the student's complaint so as to live with his thoughts . . . with his worries that have no end. But the noise of the students starts to increase bit by bit to the extent that he imagines these sounds are coming from Hell . . . his nerves cannot bear more . . . vehemently and furiously he shouts, "Shut up."

Silence prevails on all as if the birds are above their heads . . . it is stillness like that of the dead . . . even this silence becomes unbearable. All have been stricken dumb. All start looking at the reading texts that are in front of them, except one student who looks at him as if he were about to say something, yet the strict features of his face eliminate every desire his student has to speak.

He pays attention to the student's looks that chase him and says, "Finish up your reading . . ."

A child blows and cleans his nose, using his dirty handkerchief while another fat child sitting near the window is yawning.

Why does he not leave the work?

Why does he not resign?

There are many questions that usually confront him when he thinks about leaving his work . . . what will he do after that? How can he make his living and his family's living, for he is in charge of his family? Is he going to leave his responsibility towards them?

He responds to himself:

Jobs are many . . . it is not necessary to work in teaching itself. He can work as an employee in one of the governmental quarters or one of the national establishments; even if he would not find a job like the current one, he has no objection to becoming a construction worker or a tradesman in a workshop. And he imagines himself wearing khaki pants and a shirt stained with oils . . . and saying to his bosses whenever one of them orders him to carry out a mission:

"Yes, sir."

And the problem will be solved . . .

And a voice rises reading:

"Mohammed writes his lesson and r . . ."

He tries to ignore the voice, and lives with his thoughts and memories.

He looks out at space through the bars of the one and only window in the class that is more like a cell of a stinking prison.

The matter is easier than he guessed. He will find a job whatever the work is . . . it is important that it be close to his family. Why not try now and write a resignation draft . . . let it be a trial, he will not lose anything anyhow.

He sits down in his chair, and starts writing . . .

"Excuse me! O, teacher . . . Right Honorable the Principal wants you . . . he has just arrived." The manservant throws up these words stupidly and then leaves . . . damn you . . . don't you stop bothering me, oh uncouth manservant, even in the critical moments, and this principal . . . what does he want? He always travels . . . and always comes back; can't he wait until the end of the class? Is he so eager to greet me that he has sent the manservant to let me know, before the class ends; this is foolishness . . . indeed the ultimate foolishness.

He leaves his students after warning them he will beat them if he hears their silly voices. He is sure he will hear their voices after the first step he takes outside the classroom.

He goes into the principal's office with the page of his mind clear of anything at that moment.

And when he reads the memo the principal gives him, he does not believe . . . he reads it once, and many times, to be sure that he does not dream. He feels that he needs to laugh, to dance . . . to kiss all his colleagues and students . . . just now he discovers that he loves them all . . . even the manservant with whom he used to dispute many times.

And when all shake hands with him, saying goodbye to him and he leaves the *hijra* forever . . . he hugs them with new copious feeling, full of love, faith, and loyalty . . . this is what he feels towards them from the time he receives the memo issued by the officials of education in his country, which states his transfer to his village's school, in addition to raising his salary in recognition of his efforts and honesty in his work. A miracle has happened, a miracle no one dreams of.

Conclusion

As stated earlier in the introduction, readers will have an opportunity to read for this Saudi writer. Translations are needed, particularly in our time, in order to develop an atmosphere of knowing and understanding other cultures and people; translations will help a lot here and people who have no access to some cultures will read about them. In "Elapsing Days," readers will experience "how literature all over the world share a lot of interests and ideas" (Dohal 2018). In addition, "readers will experience a theme all cultures share; i.e. a struggle for survival" (Dohal 2019) as it is the case in this story where an individual should maintain a financial source to live a normal life.

However, "Elapsing Days" is written by Al-Fuzai who is one of the Saudi Arabian writers who have tried to write about their society and its inconveniences. What makes Al-Fuzai different is that "he is a journalist who knows how to address his audience" (Dohal 2015) accordingly. Hence, his language as it is clear through the translated story is journalistic; i.e. simple and direct. Al-Fuzai has written few collections of short stories such as: Palm Tree and the Watch (1977), Women and Love (1978), and Thursday Fair (1979) (see Dohal 2013).

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Translator's Notes:

Note 1. This story was translated from the following Arabic source:

Al-Fuzai, Khalil I. (1979). *Thursday Fair*. (سوق الخميس). Taif: Taif Literary Club, pp. 23-28.

Note 2. . . . Every now and then there are few dots found in the source text.

Note 3. *hijra*: a small isolated village.

Note 4. An introduction a reader may need to connect the text to its context.

AUTHOR'S PROFILE:



Gassim H. Dohal is an Associate Professor of English from Saudi Arabia. He holds a Ph. D. in English literature. He has contributed research papers and articles in different academic journals. His works appeared in journals like *Agathos* journal, *International Journal of Languages, Literature and Linguistics* (IJLLL), *The IUP Journal of English Studies*, *International Journal of Comparative Literature and Translation Studies* (IJCLTS), and others.